

# MIS Working Papers



□ FACULTÉ DES LETTRES, DES SCIENCES HUMAINES, DES ARTS ET DES SCIENCES DE L'ÉDUCATION

## **Language profiles and practices of cross-border workers in Luxembourg**

Anne Franziskus, Julia de Bres

MIS-Working Paper 2

Luxembourg 2015

## **Authors**

Prof. Dr. Julia de Bres  
Université du Luxembourg  
Institute of Luxembourgish Language and Literatures  
julia.debres@uni.lu

Dr. Anne Franziskus  
Luxembourg National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies  
Former PhD student in the Institute of Luxembourgish Language and Literatures (Université du Luxembourg)

## **Contact MIS**

Université du Luxembourg  
Belval Campus – Maison des Sciences Humaines  
Key Area Multilingualism and Intercultural Studies (MIS)  
11, porte des Sciences  
L-4366 Esch-sur-Alzette  
mis@uni.lu | www.mis.lu

# Language profiles and practices of cross-border workers in Luxembourg

## Abstract

This paper summarises the findings of a questionnaire study investigating the language profiles and practices of cross-border workers in Luxembourg. The study was undertaken in 2009 and includes 128 cross-border workers from 35 workplaces from different sectors, including the health sector, higher education and research, the manufacturing industry and the service sector. The study suggests that all the participants have a multilingual profile and have learnt at least one language in addition to their first one in the course of their life. A second result is that French is used in all the workplaces under investigation. But, at the same time, the majority of the cross-border worker participants have a multilingual professional life, most of them using more than one language at work on an everyday basis. This multilingualism comes in the form of a wide range of multilingual practices, including language accommodation, use of a lingua franca, code-switching and receptive multilingualism. Furthermore, two thirds of the participants report having learnt Luxembourgish either formally or informally, and half of those who have not learnt it, would like to do so in the future.

## Introduction

Since the late 1980s, cross-border workers have become a crucial element of Luxembourg's labour market. Nevertheless, very little qualitative sociolinguistic research has so far included them.<sup>1</sup> This report presents the main results of a 2009 questionnaire study about cross-border workers in a selected range of workplaces in Luxembourg. The study was part of a larger project investigating the language practices and ideologies of cross-border workers in Luxembourg (see end of the report for further publications from this project). The broader project was undertaken between 2009 and 2013 and included a mixed data set of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and recordings of face-to-face interactions between cross-border workers. The research project was undertaken by Julia de Bres (Post-doctoral researcher) and Anne Franziskus (PhD candidate) at the University of Luxembourg and funded by the Fonds national de la Recherche (FNR).

The aims of the research were several, including:

- To investigate an under-researched population within the sociolinguistic environment of Luxembourg (cross-border workers), about whom little is known in terms of language practices and language attitudes;

---

<sup>1</sup> Cross-border workers have been excluded from the great majority of sociolinguistic research on Luxembourg, which has tended to concentrate on residents of Luxembourg (e.g. Fehlen et al 1998). Some studies examine the linguistic perceptions of cross-border workers in Luxembourg, such as Derveaux and Esmein (1998), who interviewed French cross-border workers on their linguistic experiences in Luxembourg, and Wille (2012), who undertook questionnaires and interviews with cross-border workers in Luxembourg on the theme of their sense of identity, as well as their linguistic experiences. Fehlen (2009) also includes a discussion of the perceptions of cross-border workers towards the use of languages in Luxembourg, based on an analysis of comments on two internet forums, one French-speaking ([www.lesfrontaliers.lu](http://www.lesfrontaliers.lu)) and the other German-speaking ([www.diegrenzgaenger.lu](http://www.diegrenzgaenger.lu)). However, these studies either have a rather small sample size or corpus (Derveaux et Esmein 1998, Fehlen 2009) or languages make up only a minor aspect of the study (Wille 2012).

- To explore language practices used to deal with linguistic diversity in workplaces in Luxembourg where there is a linguistically diverse population of workers;
- To enquire into attitudes towards, and use of, the Luxembourgish language in particular among cross-border workers.

The report is structured as follows. First, we describe the main methodological elements of the study. Next we present the participants. The remainder of the report presents results relating to the reported language proficiency, language use and language attitudes of the cross-border worker participants, including particular attention to their attitudes towards and use of Luxembourgish.

## **Methodology**

The project targeted the specific context of the workplace, and cross-border worker participants living in France, Belgium and Germany were recruited from a selection of workplaces in Luxembourg. The project as a whole combined quantitative, qualitative and ethnographic approaches, using questionnaires, interviews and recordings of language use at work. The current report focuses on selected findings from the questionnaire data only. This part of the project involved 128 participants in total.

### **Selection criteria**

Several criteria guided the data collection planning. One criterion was that the participating workplaces should employ cross-border workers. Secondly, cross-border workers from France, Belgium and Germany should be represented among the participants. Furthermore, the workplaces recruited should be from different sectors.

The participants were recruited through direct contact with workplaces and through invitations to individuals to participate in the project. The invitation was publicised through the Luxembourg media. A press release was sent out to major media outlets in Luxembourg in July 2009, in response to which both workplaces and individual cross-border workers signalled their interest to participate. Four specific workplaces were included in the study, to gain a more detailed picture of language use at specific workplaces, as well as a range of further cross-border workers from a broader range of workplaces (the latter participants are referred to in this report as ‘individuals’).

### **Data collection**

After initial planning and designing of the questionnaire and approaches to relevant workplaces during May and June 2009, the data collection ran from July to October 2009. In total, 133 questionnaires were sent out to participants, of which 128 questionnaires were returned (96% response rate). As an incentive to participate in the project, the participants were offered a 10 euro gift voucher for completing the questionnaire. The participants were free to fill out the questionnaire in French, German or English. The questionnaire included questions on self-reported language proficiency, language practices in the workplace, and attitudes towards Luxembourgish and other languages in Luxembourg and at work.

### **Information on workplace and sectors**

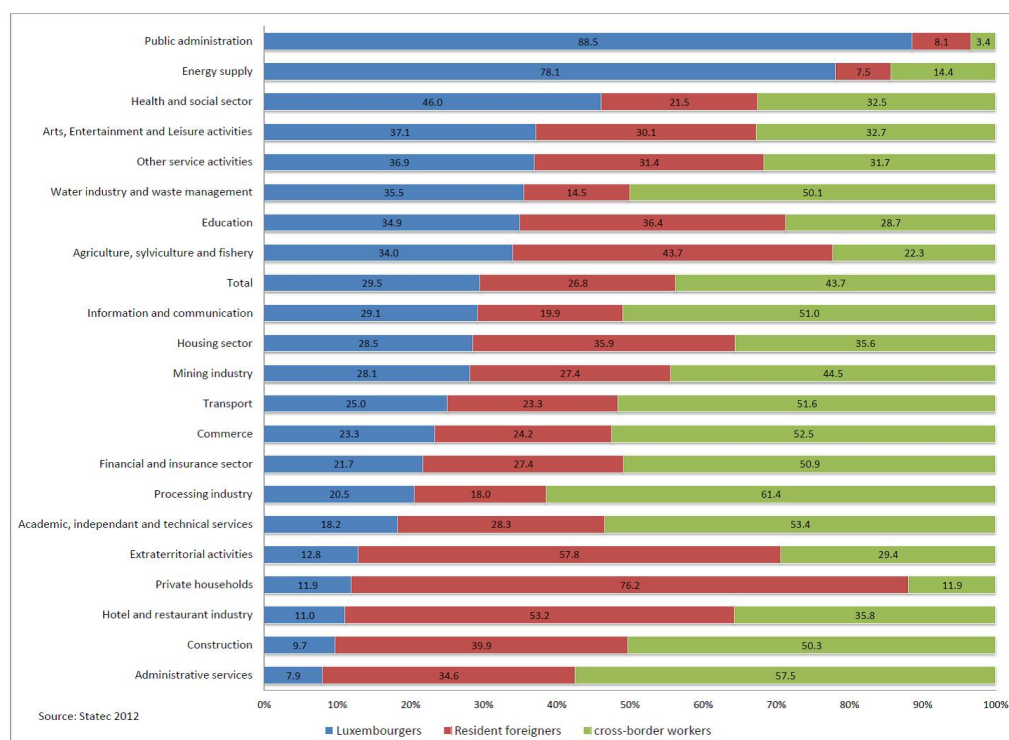
The participants were recruited from 35 workplaces in total. They were employed at 4 main workplaces, as well as 31 further workplaces. The four main workplaces included a social

service provider, a distribution company, an educational organisation and a research centre. The individual workplaces come from a broader range of sectors, including real estate, the public service, retail, food production, insurance and construction. The number of participants from each of the main participating workplaces is shown below. The number of participants ranged from 18 at the distribution company to 33 at the research centre. The corpus as a whole has good coverage of the range of sectors in which cross-border workers are employed in Luxembourg.

*Table 1: Questionnaires completed at participating workplaces*

Workplace	Questionnaires returned
Education institution	22
Research centre	33
Social service provider	23
Distribution company	18
Individuals	32
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>128</b>

*Fig. 1: Distribution of residents and non-residents in the Luxembourgish labour market*



Source: Statec 2012

## Limitations

The sample of participants in the study is relatively small, the participants are concentrated at four workplaces, and there is an uneven amount of participants from each workplace. For these reasons, we make no claim that the results are representative of the broader cross-border worker population in Luxembourg as a whole, but we do believe that detailed small-scale research such as that reported here allows us to gain insights into possible broader trends.

## Profile of participants

This section describes the participants with regard to their gender, age, nationality, education and place of residence.

### Gender and age

The participants were 54% male and 46% female. The participants spanned a wide range of age brackets, but tended to be younger rather than older: it was most common for the participants to be aged between 30 and 34 (26%), and 63 % were between the ages of 30 and 44.

### Nationality

The nationality of the participants is shown in the table below. Most were French (48%), followed by German (23%) and Belgian (24%), and the remaining participants (10%) had a range of further nationalities. Four of the participants with 'other' nationalities had double nationality, and if those with French as one of these nationalities (N=3) are included in the overall category of French nationality, the proportion of French nationals rises to 50%. These proportions are roughly comparable to the proportion of French, German and Belgians in the cross-border worker population as a whole in Luxembourg, as stated in Statec (2009), although in our case the French and Belgian participants are slightly under-represented and the German and 'other' participants are slightly over-represented.

*Table 2: Comparison between nationality of participants and cross-border workers in Luxembourg*

Nationality	Participants (%)	Cross-border workers in Luxembourg (Statec 2009) (%)
French	47.7	58
Belgian	23.4	30
German	18.8	12
Other	10.2	? <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> It is unclear why Statec (2009) does not include figures for cross-border workers of non-Belgian, -French or -German nationality, as these surely exist. It is possible that the publication refers to people living in these countries rather than their nationality, although this is not how the figures are presented. If country of residence is used instead of nationality, cross-border workers resident in France and Belgium continue to be under-represented in the study (51% compared to 58% for French, 22% compared to 30% for Belgians) and cross-border workers resident in Germany are more significantly overrepresented in the study (27% compared to 12%).



## Educational level

The participants generally had a high level of education, the most common being for them to have a postgraduate university degree (described in the questionnaire as a Masters or doctorate). The very high level of education of many of the participants is the result of the choice of two of our workplaces (the research centre and the education institution).

## Place of residence

The participants tended to live in the country of which they were national, although some of them had moved within the Greater Region. More precisely, all the German nationals lived in Germany, but four of the French participants lived in Belgium, one Belgian participant lived in France and one in Germany. Of the 13 participants with other nationalities, seven lived in France, four in Germany and one in Belgium. Most of the participants (61 %) were born in the region in which they still lived. In this regard, they reflect the overall cross-border worker population in Luxembourg. Berger (2005) showed that 8 out of 10 cross-border workers are 'native' to their region, by which he means that they were born and had lived most of their lives in their region of residence.

## Time working in Luxembourg

Most of the participants had been working in Luxembourg for fewer than ten years (77 %). It was most common for the participants to have been working in Luxembourg for between 1 and 5 years (44 %).

## Reasons for coming to Luxembourg

The participants were asked about their reasons for coming to Luxembourg to work. A range of pre-selected options were presented. The most common answer was higher remuneration (66 %), followed by better career opportunities (45 %) and better working conditions (39 %).

*Table 3: Reasons for coming to Luxembourg*

Reasons	Frequency	% of participants
Higher remuneration	84	66
Better career opportunities	57	45
Better working conditions	50	39
Job in my field	49	38
No jobs in my region	29	23

The participants were also invited to provide other reasons for their decision to work in Luxembourg. Reasons given included family, personal and geographic reasons, as well as the opportunity to work in a multicultural environment. These results suggest that the motivation of some of the participants was not (primarily) of an economic nature.

## Time intended to work in Luxembourg

The participants were asked for how long they intended to continue working in Luxembourg. The most common result was ‘more than ten years’ (45%). Eight participants also introduced a new category of ‘until retirement’. If this is added to the previous result, 52% of participants intended to keep working in Luxembourg for at least ten years or until retirement. This result is interesting in terms of the topic of language, given that participants might potentially have a higher level of motivation to invest in language learning if they intend to work in Luxembourg for the rest of their career.

## Preference of place of work

The participants were asked where, all things being equal, they would prefer to work: in Luxembourg, in their region of residence, elsewhere in their country of residence, or somewhere else entirely. The most popular response was Luxembourg (38%), closely followed by their region of residence (32%). Thirteen participants would prefer to work more generally in their country of residence (10%). The remaining participants stated a range of further locations, including specific countries (the USA, Italy, Canada, Quebec, Switzerland, New Zealand, South Africa, Australia) or less specific options such as ‘somewhere with a better climate’ or ‘in a foreign country’. These findings suggest that many of the participants would not necessarily choose to work in their region of residence if they had the choice, but were rather content with Luxembourg being their place of employment.

## Language proficiency

This section describes the self-reported language proficiency of the participants. This includes their first languages and the languages they learnt in the course of their lives. It also includes regional varieties known by the participants.

### First languages

The participants were asked the first language they had spoken as a child. The most common first language was French (63%), befitting the high proportion of French and Belgian participants. The second most common first language was German (20%). Seven participants (6%) stated two first languages<sup>3</sup> and several participants stated a regional variety as their first language, sometimes in combination with another language (e.g. Moselle Franconian and German; Eifel dialect and German). The first language of the participants bore a strong relationship to nationality, as shown in Table 4 for the three main nationality groups.

---

<sup>3</sup> In retrospect, the question should have allowed for multiple responses, so multiple first languages may have been under-reported.



*Table 4: Relationship between nationality and first language of participants*

Nationality	First language is dominant language of country (%)	First language is other language (N)
French	93 (French)	2 Lorraine dialect 1 Moselle Franconian 1 German
German	80 (German)	2 Moselle Franconian and German 1 Eifel dialect and German 1 Moselle Franconian 1 Hohwaller dialect 1 Britter dialect
Belgian	88 (French)	2 Dutch (Flemish) 1 French and Dutch 1 Unspecified German dialect

The results for the Belgian participants reflect the bilingual status of Belgium (i.e. the presence of Flemish), and the results for the German participants reflect a higher reported use of (German) dialects than the French participants.

## Regional varieties

Secondly, the participants were asked to state any dialects that they spoke<sup>4</sup>. The majority stated no such dialect (61%). Some participants indicated varieties from the Moselle Franconian dialect area, variously labelled, e.g. Moselle Franconian (5%), Platt Lorrain (4%), Moselle dialect (1%), Pfalzisch (1%) and Saarlandish (4%). Aside from these local varieties, other participants stated a range of German, Belgian and French regional varieties, such as Kolsch (1%), Wallon (5%) and Alsatian (2%). The German participants were more likely to report speaking a dialect than the Belgian or French participants. Some varieties from further afield were stated by participants of ‘other’ nationalities, e.g. Algerian or Tunisian (1% each).

## Languages learnt

Thirdly, the participants were asked which languages they had learnt later in life. Every participant except one specified at least one language. It was most common for participants to specify two languages (33%), followed by three languages (31%). One participant specified six languages, and one participant seven. In other words, all the participants but one had a multilingual profile. The most frequent languages for the participants to have learnt were English, German, Luxembourgish and French.

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘dialect’ was used instead of the sociolinguistic term ‘variety’ as we considered that the participants would better understand this term.

As many of the participants already had German or French as a first language, the more interesting results here were the very high proportion of participants who had learnt English (90%) and the substantial proportion who had learnt Luxembourgish (37%). The remaining languages learnt by the participants were mainly European languages (with notably Spanish, Dutch and Italian all learnt by between 10 and 20 percent of the participants), whereas languages from other parts of the world were very uncommon.

## Languages spoken at home

Not all the participants used exclusively French or German in the home. Several participants used neither French nor German in the home, e.g. they used Arabic, Romanian or Polish instead. There was a notable reported frequency of bilingualism in the home in French and another language (e.g. French and Tunisian, French and English) and in German and a German regional variety (e.g. German and Saarlandish, German and Eifel dialect).

## Languages used at work

In this section, we present results relating to language use at the participants' workplaces. We first present the results for overall reported language use at the workplaces, followed by their attitudes towards multilingualism at work, and then focus more particularly on the multilingual practices the participants reported to adopt to deal with linguistic diversity at work.

### Overall language use at work

The participants were first asked to list all the languages used at their workplace, not only those that they used themselves. The answers to this question were very varied, and included a large number of different language combinations. French was present at every workplace in the sample, but only three participants stated French as the only language used. Furthermore, 87 % of the participants reported that Luxembourgish was present at their workplace, 80% German, 69 % English, and 34 % Portuguese.

The participants were then asked to rank in order which languages were used most frequently at their workplace. In general terms, French was the most frequently used language, followed by Luxembourgish, German, English and Portuguese.

The results for this question showed a relationship between the language combinations and the particular workplaces. The most important finding in this regard relates to the use of Luxembourgish on the one hand and English and German on the other. Luxembourgish took a much lower position at the white collar workplaces (the education institution and the research centre) and English and German were more present in these workplaces. In contrast, Luxembourgish was much more prominent in the distribution company, the social service provider and other blue collar workplaces in general. German was also present to some degree at the blue collar workplaces, but English was insignificantly present there. Also notable was that the use of Portuguese was apparent at the blue collar workplaces and virtually absent at the white collar workplaces. The languages most frequently reported as being used at the different workplaces are summarised in table 5 below.

*Table 5: Summary ranking of most frequently used languages at each workplace*

Sample as a whole	Social service provider	Distribution company	Education institution	Research centre	Individuals
1. French	1. French	1. French	1. French	1. French	1. French
2. Lux	2. Lux	2. Lux	(1.5 German <sup>5</sup> )	2. English	2. French + German
3. German	3. German	3. Portuguese	2. English	3. German	3. French + Lux
4. English	4. Portuguese		3. Lux	4. Lux	
5. Portuguese					

These results for overall language use at work align with the findings from other research, where residents of Luxembourg were asked about their language use at work (Fehlen 2009, 2012).

### Personal language use at work

Secondly, participants were asked to rank in order the languages they personally used at work. Again, French was the most cited language: 72% of the participants reported using this language most. German was mentioned in second place (11%), followed by Luxembourgish and English in third equal place (8%) and Spanish in final place (1%). The second most frequently used language at work was English (41%), followed by Luxembourgish (21%), German (19%), no stated language (10%) and French (7%). Dutch and Italian also figured here (both 1%). All in all, there was a strong prominence of four main languages: French, English, Luxembourgish and German. A further element suggested by these results is a lower degree of reported multilingualism among individuals than for the workplaces as a whole. Whereas most participants selected several languages as being present at their workplace, it was most common for the sample as a whole to select only one or two languages that they personally used.

### Language use by domain

The participants were asked to report which language(s) they usually used for eleven specific tasks at work. The tasks included:

- Greeting colleagues
- Making phone calls
- Writing emails
- Speaking with colleagues in the corridor
- Having meetings
- Writing reports
- Reading work-related documents

---

<sup>5</sup> This is the one workplace that does not have a clear profile for which languages are in which position. Going by the most frequently selected languages in each position, German would not feature at all, but it appears as a runner-up in several positions, particularly nearer the top. It seems best placed in position 1.5 between French and English.

- Having lunch with colleagues
- Speaking with a manager
- Speaking with a secretary
- Communicating with clients

The most common languages used for these tasks at work were French, Luxembourgish, English and German. French strongly dominated in every category except greeting colleagues, where Luxembourgish was also present in first place, and communicating with clients, where English was also present in first place. English was prominent in general, most commonly sharing second place with French in the combination of languages used for each task. Luxembourgish was often more prominent than German, but not for tasks involving writing or reading, where it was surpassed by German. Finally, a range of other languages were also used for most of the tasks, including Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Arabic and Portuguese, but to very limited extents, and especially less so during meetings.

*Table 6: Summary of languages used for different tasks at work*

<b>Task</b>	<b>Most common response (%)</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> most common response (%)</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> most common response (%)</b>
Greeting colleagues	F + L (19)	L (16)	F (16)
Making phone calls	F (28)	F + E (17)	F + L (12)
Writing emails	F (31)	F + E (23)	G + G + E (8)
Speaking with colleagues in the corridor	F (37)	F + E (11)	F + G + L (9)
Having meetings	F (32)	F + E (20)	F + L (9)
Writing reports	F (44)	F + E (18)	E (15)
Reading work-related documents	F (31)	F + E (20)	F + G + E (11)
Having lunch with colleagues	F (38)	F + L (11)	F + E (9)
Speaking with a manager	F (46)	G (9)	F + L (9)
Speaking with a secretary	F (46)	G (9)	F + L (9)
Communicating with clients	F + E (19)	F (13)	F + L (10)

It is important to note here the considerable differences in reported languages used at work by participants from the same workplace. This both shows we cannot generalize from an individual's description of their workplace language use to languages used at a workplace in general and suggests the wide diversity of language experiences and practices even within one workplace in Luxembourg (including different offices, different corridors, different divisions, different work locations). In Luxembourg it seems individual and group language practices can

vary from room to room. Nevertheless, there do seem to be some broader differences between workplaces reflected in the data (see for instance section above on overall language use at work).

### Attitudes towards multilingualism at work

The participants were also asked to signal their level of agreement to ten statements about the use of languages at work, in order to investigate their attitudes towards multilingualism at work. Half of the statements were designed to reflect a more monolingual perspective and half a more multilingual perspective. The results in relation to the statements can be summarized as follows.

In relation to results reflecting a monolingual perspective, the participants were most likely to: agree that the presence of multiple languages caused problems for workers (37 %), agree that using a common language made achieving work tasks more effective (49%), disagree that they usually felt comfortable when colleagues were speaking a language they couldn't understand at work (33%), and agree that they generally felt excluded when people spoke a language they couldn't understand at work (35%).

In relation to results reflecting a multilingual perspective, however, the participants were most likely to agree that using other languages at work improved relationships with colleagues (49%), agree that the presence of multiple languages made work more fun (34%), agree that having different languages at work encouraged people to help each other (46%), agree that multilingualism improved communication at work (42%), disagree that language caused stress at work (35%), and disagree that it is best if only one language is used at work (41%).

These results suggest that multilingualism was perceived by the participants as a whole as a challenge for the task-based aspects of work, but as an asset for the more relational aspects of work. Note, however, in this regard the level of discomfort the participants indicated about not understanding the languages around them: although they generally disagreed that language caused stress at work, they also claimed to feel uncomfortable and excluded when they couldn't understand a language used in their presence.

### Multilingual practices

In this section, we discuss in more detail the multilingual practices participants used to deal with the linguistic diversity at their workplace. The participants were asked to rate on a five point scale how often they and/or those they interacted with at work engaged in a range of multilingual practices. The following table shows the list of practices proposed, based on practices commonly identified in the literature on multilingualism.

*Table 7: Summary of statements used for different language practices*

Language practice	Statement
Bilingualism and language choice	1. I speak my first language at work.
	2. I speak two or more languages during the course of one day.
Language accommodation	3. I change languages to speak the first language of another colleague.

Language practice	Statement
	4. Colleagues change languages to speak my first language when talking to me.
Using a lingua franca	5. I have conversations where a colleague and I are both speaking a language that is not our first language.
Code-switching	6. I switch between languages during the same sentence at work.
	7. I switch between languages during the same conversation at work.
Receptive multilingualism	8. I have conversations where I speak my own language and a colleague speaks their own language.
Language negotiation	9. I try to influence the language to be used in a conversation.

First of all, the results showed that the majority of the participants were able to speak their own first language at work: 66 % reported doing so very often, and 21 % often. However, this does not mean that the participants never used other languages at work and that their practices were monolingual. The majority reported that they often (28%) or very often (38%) spoke two or more languages in the course of one day and more than half of them (59 %) indicated that they spoke a language other than their first language often or very often at work (21 % often, 38 % very often). This aligns with the results for language accommodation, where the participants reported that they sometimes (27%), often (27%) or very often (10%) adapted to the first language of a colleague. Another frequently cited practice was speaking with colleagues in a language that was the first language of neither, i.e. to use a lingua franca (often 23 % and very often 16 %). One practice participants reported adopting more rarely was that of having conversations where each person spoke their own language (receptive multilingualism): only 17 % reported adopting this practice often or very often. The participants also generally claimed not to try to influence the language used in an interaction (21% never, 27% rarely).

As part of this section, the participants were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement ‘I have difficulties using languages at work’. Interestingly, the participants overall did not appear to experience such difficulties: for only a very small proportion was this the case often (13%) or very often (6%). It is possible that this result was affected by the social desirability bias, but the low proportion of agreement to the statement is nevertheless striking.

## The influence of workplace

As with the results for general language use at work, the specific workplace proved to have an impact on the reported language practices of the participants. We highlight two aspects of the results in particular here: the overall degree of multilingual practices adopted by the cross-border workers and their use of Luxembourgish.

The participants at the distribution company had the most monolingual practices and accommodated to their colleagues the least. 33 % of them reported never speaking two or more languages during the course of one day, 17% did rarely, 22% did often and only 6% did so very



often. On the other hand, the individual participants and those working in the education institution used more than two languages frequently: 77% of the participants at the education institution did so often to very often, as well as 75% of the individuals. Secondly, half of the participants at the distribution company reported never accommodating to their colleagues.

Another interesting influence of the workplace is related to the participants' use of Luxembourgish. The participants from the social service provider were most likely to report using Luxembourgish regularly: 35 % did so very often and 26 % often. This means that for nearly two thirds of the participants in the health sector workplace using Luxembourgish was a common practice at work. In contrast, only 24 % of the participants as a whole used Luxembourgish often or very often. Luxembourgish was least used among participants at the distribution company, the education institution and the research center: 46 % at the education institution, 67 % at the research centre and 44% at the distribution company declared never using Luxembourgish. It is interesting that use of Luxembourgish did not seem to be necessarily more predominant in white or blue collar workplaces. The higher use of Luxembourgish in the social service provider can, however, be attributed to the fact that skills in this language are a requirement for recruitment in the sector in which this organization operates (the health sector).

## **Use of Luxembourgish and attitudes towards learning Luxembourgish**

In the previous section, we briefly discussed the use of Luxembourgish by the participants. This final section addresses this issue in more detail, and more particularly the attitudes of the cross-border worker participants towards learning Luxembourgish. The participants were first asked whether they had previously learnt Luxembourgish and, if so, in which contexts and for what reasons. Two thirds (65 %) of the participants stated that they had learnt Luxembourgish, compared to 34% who had not done so. 26% stated that they had learnt the language informally, 34% formally and 6% both informally and formally. This seems a high proportion of participants to have learnt Luxembourgish, and is likely to be explained partly by differing interpretations of what is meant by learning Luxembourgish 'informally'. Nevertheless, those who stated that they had learnt Luxembourgish formally (either with or without learning it informally as well) amount to 39% of the participants.

The top three most commonly stated reasons for having learnt Luxembourgish were to use at work (21%), for work and social reasons (7%), and in equal third place to better communicate with others and because it was the language of the country they worked in (5% each). Although instrumental reasons figure most highly, there were also a number of integrative reasons in the remaining responses (e.g. to feel more at ease in the country, interest, Luxembourgish family and friends).

Among those who had not learnt Luxembourgish, the top three most commonly stated reasons for not having done so were lack of time (6%), lack of need (6%) and lack of opportunity (4%). These reasons are frequently cited in the literature on learning minority languages. One reason particular to this context, however, was the response of some German participants who stated that they could get by using German or their regional variety of German, as it was close to Luxembourgish, rather than needing to learn Luxembourgish itself.

Those participants who could not speak Luxembourgish were then asked to state their level of agreement with a set of statements relating to the Luxembourgish language<sup>6</sup>. These responses

---

<sup>6</sup> In retrospect, it would have been preferable to ask this question of all participants. When designing the questionnaire, we assumed that those who could speak Luxembourgish would have more positive attitudes towards

were used to create an index involving negative attitudes towards the Luxembourgish language (0 to 33 %), mixed attitudes (above this up to 67%) and positive attitudes (above this up to 100%). Most participants had mixed attitudes towards Luxembourgish (59%). Next most common was pro-Luxembourgish attitudes (30%) and then anti-Luxembourgish attitudes (11%). It was more common for French and Belgian participants to be in the pro-Luxembourgish category than German participants. It must be noted, however, that as a group the German participants were much more likely to be in the 'not applicable' category because they could already speak Luxembourgish. It is likely that this non-applicable category would include those German participants with the most positive attitudes towards Luxembourgish.

Almost half of those participants who had not yet learnt Luxembourgish claimed to be interested in learning Luxembourgish (48%). One of the reasons given for learning this language is that it would serve their professional interests: 28% of them agreed that learning Luxembourgish would be useful for their current job and 31 % thought that it would be useful for their future career. In addition, the relational aspect also played a role in their motivation to learn the language: 40% agreed that learning Luxembourgish could improve their relationships with their colleagues, and that this would be a way of showing respect towards Luxembourgers (38 %). 42 % of the participants would appreciate assistance from their employer in their learning efforts.

The participants as a whole were most likely to disagree that learning Luxembourgish was too difficult (41%), that there was no point in them learning Luxembourgish (36%) and that that it was too expensive to learn Luxembourgish (33%). These results suggest predominantly positive attitudes towards learning Luxembourgish. On the other hand, the participants also most commonly agreed that learning Luxembourgish was not a priority for them (40%), that they did not have enough time to learn Luxembourgish (34%) and that they got along fine with their existing languages without having to use Luxembourgish (45%).

As part of the statements, the participants were also asked whether they felt under pressure to learn Luxembourgish. The most common response was for them to disagree that they felt such pressure (41%). These results suggest that although the participants as a whole mostly had a positive orientation towards learning Luxembourgish, those who had not yet learnt it did not generally feel motivated (or incited) to translate this into actually learning Luxembourgish.

## Conclusion

This report has presented the main findings of a research project on the language practices and attitudes of cross-border workers in Luxembourg, based on a 2009 questionnaire study with 128 cross-border workers at a range of workplaces in Luxembourg. It described the overall profiles of the participants, their language backgrounds, their language use at work and their use of, and attitudes towards, Luxembourgish in particular. Although the results of the study cannot be seen to be representative of the entire population of cross-border workers in Luxembourg, they nevertheless provide interesting first insights into the language practices of cross-border workers, who have so far tended to be neglected in sociolinguistic research in Luxembourg.

One main result from the study is that the majority of the cross-border worker participants had a multilingual professional life, most of them using more than one language at work on an everyday basis. This multilingualism comes in the form of a wide range of multilingual prac-

---

the language, and we were thus more interested in learning of the attitudes of people who currently did not speak the language.

tices, including language accommodation, use of a lingua franca, code-switching and receptive multilingualism, among others. In this regard, it is also interesting to observe that half of the participants of the study had learnt Luxembourgish and that many of them also used this language in their workplace context. This runs counter to prevailing discourses about the monolingual character of cross-border workers and their assumed lack of interest in learning Luxembourgish or using languages other than their first language. The results for the participants' attitudes towards multilingualism at work overall suggest that while multilingualism may be perceived as presenting some challenges, it was generally seen by the participants as a positive aspect of working life in Luxembourg.

On the other hand, the results show the importance of the French language in workplace settings in Luxembourg. Although this result is more particularly linked to cross-border workers in this report, it nevertheless aligns with previous research findings on language use at work in Luxembourg. For example, Fehlen (2009) showed that French is the main language in workplace settings in Luxembourg. This dominance of French in workplace settings also explains why the Francophone-origin participants were those who used their first language most often at work: given that their language is so prevalent in the Luxembourg context, they have more opportunities to speak their first language than, for example, Germanophone-origin participants.

The study also showed a high degree of diversity both within and between workplaces in terms of the language practices participants adopted to communicate with colleagues. Reported practices could vary significantly between colleagues within the same workplace, but the specific workplace also appeared to act as a significant constraint on multilingual practices, both affecting the overall language use at the workplace (e.g. whether or not Luxembourgish was an important language in the workplace) and individuals' own language practices (e.g. their use of Luxembourgish). This highlights the importance of taking into account not only the personal (e.g. national and language) backgrounds and language preferences of individuals but also the specific constraints of the workplace environment (e.g. language policies, ideologies and norms) in accounting for patterns of multilingualism and language choice. Much more research remains to be done to investigate all the different influences on multilingual practices in workplace settings, in Luxembourg and elsewhere in the world.

## Other documents related to the project

As stated in the introduction, the present report focused only on the questionnaire aspect of the research project. Other publications relating to the interviews and the ethnographic study include the following:

- de Bres, Julia fc. *Competing language ideological perspectives on societal multilingualism among cross-border workers in Luxembourg*. International Journal of the Sociology of Language (special issue on 'Borders and Language: international perspectives').
- de Bres, Julia, 2013. *Language ideologies for constructing inclusion and exclusion: identity and interest in the metalinguistic discourse of cross-border workers in Luxembourg*. In Barat, Erzebet, Studer, Patrick and Nekvapil, Jiri (eds.). *Ideological Conceptualisations of Language: Discourses of Linguistic Diversity*. Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang (Prague Papers on Language, Society and Interaction), pp. 57-83.
- de Bres, Julia and Franziskus, Anne, 2012. *Grensarbeiders, meertaligheid en het gebruik van Luxemburgs op het werk in Luxembourg*. In Degadt, Jan, Metsenaere, Machteld se, Vlieger, Mieke de, Janssens, Rudi, Mares, Anne and Wynsberghe, Caroline van (eds.). *De Internationalisering van de Vlaamse Rand Rond Brussel*. Brussels: ASP (Academic & Scientific Publishers), pp. 234-257.

- de Bres, Julia and Franziskus, Anne, 2011. *Les frontaliers au Luxembourg: représentations négatives et stratégies de réponse*. Proceedings of conference 'Représentations du transfrontalier', 16-17 septembre 2010, Mulhouse, France. Mulhouse: Université de Haute Alsace, pp. 201-212.
- Franziskus, Anne, 2013. *Getting by in a multilingual workplace: Language practices, norms and ideologies of cross-border workers in Luxembourg*. Université du Luxembourg: Unpublished PhD thesis.
- Franziskus, Anne and de Bres, Julia, fc. *Interactive and ideological dimensions of receptive multilingualism in Luxembourg workplaces*. In: Hohenstein, Christiane and Manchen Spoerri, Sylvia (eds.). *Lingua Franca Communication in Team Work: Perspectives on Linguae francae beyond ELF in international enterprises and organisations*.
- Franziskus, Anne, Bres, Julia de and Gilles, Peter, 2013. 'I learnt English – the wrong thing, eh' – power, interests and language practices among cross-border workers in Luxembourg. In Gilles, Peter, Koff, Harlan, Maganda, Carmen and Schulz, Christian (eds.). *Theorising Power through Analyses of Border Relationships*. Brussels: PIE Peter Lang, pp. 249-270.
- Franziskus, Anne and Gilles, Peter, 2012. 'Et le prâis direct etikett?' Non-overlapping repertoires in workplace communication in Luxembourg, *Sociolinguistica*, 26, pp. 58-71.
- Franziskus, Anne and Bres, Julia de, 2012. *Les pratiques linguistiques des frontaliers au Luxembourg: focalisation sur leur utilisation du luxembourgeois*. In Belkacem, Rachid and Pigeron-Piroth, Isabelle (eds.). *Le travail frontalier : pratiques, enjeux et perspectives*. Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, pp. 129-149.
- Wille, Christian, de Bres, Julia and Franziskus, Anne, 2015. *Intercultural work environments in Luxembourg. Multilingualism and cultural diversity among cross-border workers at the workplace*. University of Luxembourg: MIS working papers.
- Wille, Christian, Bres, Julia de and Franziskus, Anne, 2012. *Interkulturelle Arbeitswelten in Luxemburg. Mehrsprachigkeit und kulturelle Vielfalt am Arbeitsplatz von Grenzgängern*. *Interculture Journal*, 11 (17), pp. 73-90.

## References

- Berger, Frédéric, 2005. Développement de l'emploi transfrontalier au Luxembourg et portrait sociodémographique des frontaliers. Differdange: CEPS/INSTEAD.
- Derveaux, Philippe and Esmein, Bernard, 1998. Interviews de travailleurs frontaliers francophones. In Magère, Philippe, Esmein, Bernard and Poty, Max (eds.). *La situation de la langue française parmi les autres langues en usage au Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*. Metz : Centre culturel français de Luxembourg et Centre d'études et de recherches européennes Robert Schumann: 171-175.
- Fehlen, Fernand. 2009. BaleineBis: une Enquête sur un marché linguistique multilingue en profonde mutation/Luxemburgs Sprachenmarkt im Wandel. Luxembourg: SESOPI Centre Intercommunautaire.
- Fehlen, Fernard, Piroth, Isabelle, Schmit, C., and Legrand, Micheland Estgen, Paul, 1998. Le sondage BALEINE: Une étude sociologique sur les trajectoires migratoires, les langues et la vie associative au Luxembourg. Luxembourg: SESOPI Centre Intercommunautaire.
- Statec. 2009. L'économie luxembourgeoise en 2008 et évolution conjoncturelle récente. Luxembourg: Statec.
- Wille, Christian, 2012. *Grenzgänger und Räume der Grenze. Raumkonstruktionen in der Großregion SaarLorLux*. Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang.





Université du Luxembourg  
Belval Campus – Maison des Sciences Humaines  
Key Area Multilingualism and Intercultural Studies (MIS)  
11, porte des Sciences  
L-4366 Esch-sur-Alzette  
[mis@uni.lu](mailto:mis@uni.lu) | [www.mis.lu](http://www.mis.lu)